

International Conference
CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION IN EUROPE:
DECENTRALISATION, LEGAL FRAMEWORKS, AND PRACTICE
Dubrovnik, 25 May 2018
Summary of Discussions

The Croatian Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe (18 May - 21 November 2018) has set support to decentralisation as one of its key priorities. In this context, and in cooperation with the Croatian Government, the Centre of Expertise for Local Government Reform organised a Conference to discuss and promote legal frameworks, capacity-building tools and data collection in cross-border cooperation in Europe. The City of Dubrovnik, which is a border municipality itself, hosted this Conference. The Conference was attended by approximately 60 participants from over a dozen of countries and international organisations, including the Minister of Public Administration of Croatia, the Mayor of Dubrovnik, representatives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, officials from the EU, OSCE, AEBC (Association of European Border Regions), CESC (Central European Cross Border Initiative), CoE Congress of Local Authorities, and PACE (Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe). The main conclusions of the Conference are:

- The Madrid Outline Convention on Transfrontier Cooperation (MOC) maintains its full relevance almost 40 years after it was opened for signature, in all parts of Europe.
- The few Council of Europe member states that have not yet ratified it should reconsider their position, especially in the light of the changes that have occurred in the geopolitical situation and the spreading of all forms of cooperation. Ratification would give legal certainty and sustainability to these processes.
- The MOC has 3 additional protocols, which provide further legal basis to cross-border cooperation and bodies. CoE Member States which have not ratified them should consider doing so (e.g. Croatia). The member states should engage in dialogue with their neighbours in order not to bereave their local authorities of their 'right' to CBC.
- The CoE and the EU have developed legal frameworks for two similar and complementary legal bodies, the ECG (Euroregional Cooperation Groupings) and the EGTC (European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation). The ECG could benefit from a wider ratification of Protocol no. 3 which remains relatively low. Member states should consider the advantages of this type of CBC body in comparison to the EGTC, thus widening the range of tools available to their local and regional authorities.
- The role of the Council of Europe is essential because of its achievements and its capacity to bring those achievements closer to citizens. Dialogue with the EU on its future policy for border areas should continue.
- The Leadership Academy for CBC, the City-to-City Cooperation, as well as other tools developed by the Council of Europe, have an added value for capacity building, and as a dialogue platform for CBC.
- The EDEN database is a unique tool developed by the Council of Europe which contains member States' best practice in cross-border cooperation over a large number of areas, from health to transport, from tourism to education. It is important to keep it updated and useful for those who experience daily cross-border cooperation. Its benefits include, inter alia, raising the overall quality of CBC initiatives, avoiding duplication of efforts, savings costs through increased effectiveness and efficiency of the implemented actions. A joint, pan-European CBC database should be considered.